

# GOD WILL RAISE UP A PROPHET

## Deuteronomy 18:15-18

God's charge to Moses to lead Israel out of their slavery in Egypt and into the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should have been about a two-year journey (including their stay at Mount Sinai, *Numbers 10:11-13*; the actual trip from Mount Horeb to Canaan was only an eleven-day journey, *Deuteronomy 1:2*). The nation's refusal to submit to either God or Moses, however, resulted in their short journey metastasizing into a forty-year period of wandering in the harsh geography of the Sinai Peninsula. The book of Deuteronomy records an address Moses delivered to the Israelites at the end of that period and contains his message to the nation who would soon leave the wilderness to enter Canaan, the land God promised to them.

Deuteronomy's record of Moses' message detailed how the Jewish people should conduct themselves in Canaan and included a focus on avoiding the influence of the idolatrous people in that land. That focus, for example, organizes the material in chapter eighteen in which Moses outlines the way God permitted Israel to communicate with the supernatural world – they were to interact with God through His Levitical priests (*Deuteronomy 18:1-8*) and through His prophets (*Deuteronomy 18:15-22*) instead of idolatrous methods used by the Canaanite cultures (*Deuteronomy 18:9-14*).

Imbedded in his comments about the place of prophets in Israel, Moses included a promise that God would raise up a prophet like him for Israel to ensure the nation's ongoing leadership. That promise, however, also served a larger purpose – the New Testament reveals that it anticipated Jesus' arrival. We will therefore consider that promise and how it helps us better understand Jesus.

### A new prophet like Moses

- Deuteronomy begins in an ominous way – it recounts both Israel and Moses' failures that prevented them from entering Canaan (*Deuteronomy 1:34-40; 3:23-29*).
- While Israel's rebelliousness does not surprise readers of the Bible (it clearly and repeatedly illustrates the nation's resistance to God), Moses' failing, and punishment, does offer a surprise because the important role he holds in its story. For example:
  - Exodus introduced Moses in a way that connected him to Noah, presenting him as a new redeemer (*Genesis 5:28-29; 6:14; Exodus 2:3*).
  - The Bible accounts of Moses ascending into God's presence and reflecting His glory portray him as the person who came closest to embodying what it means to be God's image-bearer (*Exodus 34:5-7, 29-35; cf. Genesis 1:26-28*).
  - Despite his importance, Moses failed to respect God's holiness and revealed he was not good enough to be either Israel or humanity's redeemer (*Numbers 20:10-13*).

- Moses' denied entrance into Canaan created immediate problems for Israel (how would God continue to communicate with them in Moses' absence?) and raised questions about humanity's deeper problem (what would be the future of humanity's relationship with God if good people like Moses failed to successfully navigate it?).
- Moses' promise that God would raise up a prophet like him addressed Israel's immediate need of ongoing leadership while also introducing a theme God developed throughout the Old Testament of a person who would perfectly represent Him and His will in the world.
  - While the immediate setting of the promise in Deuteronomy 18 points to Joshua (*cf. Numbers 27:12-23; Deuteronomy 31:1-3, 23; 34:9*), the New Testament reveals the Jewish peoples' recognition that the promise looked forward to a person who would uniquely mediate between God and humanity (*cf. John 1:21, 25; 6:14; 7:40*) and identifies Jesus as the one fulfilled it (*Acts 3:17-26*).
  - Jesus, as God's promised prophet, steps into Moses' role in a way that both mirrors and supersedes Moses' place in the Old Testament.
    - God revealed Himself to Moses and commissioned Moses to speak on His behalf (*Numbers 12:1-9*). God similarly commissioned Jesus to speak on His behalf but, unlike Moses, Jesus also spoke from his own authority (*John 12:49; Matthew 5-7; 28:18*).
    - Because of His intimate relationship with Moses (*Numbers 12:1-9*), Moses was able to reflect God's glory (*Exodus 34:29-35*). Jesus did more than reflect God's glory; he is God (*John 1:1, 14, 18; 14:8-9; Hebrews 1:3*).
    - Moses failed in the wilderness (*Numbers 20:1-12; Deuteronomy 1:34-38; 3:26*); Jesus, however, never failed (*Hebrews 4:15; Matthew 4:1-11*).

## Applications

The parallels the New Testament makes between Moses and Jesus brings clarity to Jesus' unique and important identity. Developing our understanding of Jesus' identity helps us better understand our need for him because he alone:

- Provides us both access to God and establishes a way for us to have a relationship with Him (*John 1:1, 14; 14:1-9; Romans 5:6-11*).
- Provides us the protection and guidance we need to navigate our wilderness (*John 8:12, 31-36; Romans 8:28-30*).
- Offers us real, certain hope in a world that seeks to undermine hope (*Romans 8:31-39; Hebrew 6:13-20*).
- Offers us real hope not just of a better future, but of a better present through the transformation he effects within our lives (*Romans 7:13-8:4*).

Like Moses, we are not good enough to enter into God's promises by virtue of our lives. Jesus, however, saves us from ourselves and guarantees our entrance into God's promises. We therefore need Jesus. Let us devote ourselves to him and seek to conform our thinking and living to the pattern of his life.